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was destined not to be made. We got it made and everything seemed to work, all the concepts, the original Charlie Parker music.

Also, of Charlie Parker's relatives and friends who've seen it, they're all moved by it

and even a little spooked by it, that they were watching something they lived and they recognized as characteristic of what happened to them, and what Charlie Parker was like. I guess I'm as proud of that as I am of anything.

STEPHEN COOPER

Sex/Knowledge/Power in the Detective Genre

I am thinking of four films—*The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953), *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987)—as historical coordinates in the plot of an especially American male myth, that of the hard-boiled detective genre.¹ I am also thinking of myself as spectator, as an American male not altogether unaware of his own relation to the sexual problematics of that myth. In the following pages this relation will be given implicit utterance in the process of exploring the generic development of the detective myth as it is acted out in the character-codes of the respective protagonists of these films. I will argue that while the basic plot of the detective story remains synchronically the same over forty-some-years—the male quest, that is, through a morally ambiguous landscape for a solution to the specifics of mystery—the diachronic embodiment of the detective type undergoes such a profound growth in self-consciousness that the genre can be said effectively to have investigated and incriminated itself.

To be more specific, I am thinking of the relationships and the interrelationships of and among the male protagonists of these films with their second- or third-billed female counterparts. Functioning primarily as sexual foils to the detective, these female figures serve also as initial obstacles to and ultimate resources for the detective's inquisitive/acquisitive will-to-know. Notwithstanding the high profile given to "romantic interests" by the genre, such service suggests the exploitable continuum between, on the one hand, sex and knowledge, and, on the other, knowledge and power. But power,

whether (sur)veiled or not, whether legal or illegal, is always repressive. Thus, although the detective's acquisition of knowledge does not automatically lead to the acquisition of conventionally recognized power (in its ultimate form, the power over life and death exerted by the state or by the state's criminal other), his search for "the facts"—i.e., his quest for knowledge—would seem consistently to imply his wish for the kind of personal power by virtue of which he will be able to (super)impose his own unifying version of the truth on the fragmented world of mystery.

By this I do not mean to make any hasty identification between the detective and the conventional forces of power, namely, the law and those arrayed against it. After all, in doing battle with both of these special-interest groups, the detective does maintain a position, both professional and moral, which is precariously marginal to either camp. Nor do I intend prematurely to sound the knell of the detective genre's demise, for, aside from sheer generic resilience, there is implicit in the very idea of genre the suggestion of, even the need for, frames of reference both past and future which by definition any specific manifestation must inhabit. But the corrupting tendencies associated with the will to power are sufficiently well known that most if not all of the unsavory repressive traces thereof in the detective's ostensibly honorable will to knowledge must be displaced onto conventionally unsympathetic members of the cast, notably the heavies and the police.² Thus privileging the centrifugal demands of the genre's semantics³ for romantic tension-suspense-resolution, early film versions

of the myth avoid centripetally character-conscious self-reflexion in favor of the friction-driven dance, as it were, between male protagonist and female foil. Central but also subordinated to the main narrative quest plot, this relationship emphasizes external form and figure, measuring step for step the forward narrative pace.⁴ The closer we come to the climax of the plot, the more passionate does the relationship between detective and woman become, until, justice done (or, as in later versions of the myth, rendered impossible by force of circumstances), they must separate and go their own ways. (For the woman this typically means a violent death or, as in *The Maltese Falcon*, twenty years in Tehachapi Prison.)⁵ As everyone knows, however, tough guys don't dance, at least not until *Angel Heart*; but by then the tough-guy mask of the detective type is at the very point of self-deconstruction, having been seen through, exposed, and brought to the harshest of lights.

What I am arguing is that, like other structures of power, the detective genre over time develops its internal contradictions to such an extent that the genre's own eventual unraveling is self-assured. For all the putative personal integrity and independence ascribed to him by one of his earliest working theorists,⁶ the detective in fact does align himself implicitly with the very forces of repressive power against which he struggles (to struggle), and in so doing ultimately victimizes the women he investigates/works for/loves. "I made sure she got hurt," Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) says in flat response to a question from current lover Evelyn Mulray (Faye Dunaway) about how he went about protecting a former lover in *Chinatown*; and it is only a matter of story-time until the same thing happens to her. As *Angel Heart* so broadly puts it in its late-excessive (yet still problematically evasive) way, the detective is one of the bad guys himself.

Hints of this alignment already abound in *The Maltese Falcon*, the film generally regarded as the prototype for the whole hard-boiled genre. In the opening scene of Huston's film, Humphrey Bogart as Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade inaugurates the detective's commitment to professional duplicity by playing along with what he accurately guesses to be the emotional and factual pretense of "Miss Wonderly" (Mary Astor). Pretending to accept at face

value her story of a missing sister, he leads her on through the obligatory detective-client interview, playing up his professional sincerity as incinerately as she does hers. The false air of solicitude which he exudes perfectly matches the overdrawn innocence of her performance, but subsequent scenes make it clear that he is aware, as she is not, of the other's play-acting. The imbalance of consciousness which the film thus insists upon from the very first of its male-female set pieces is further weighted toward the male's advantage when Spade's partner, Miles Archer, barges into Spade's office in the middle of the interview. Invited to stay, Archer ogles the prospective client from behind, leering and exchanging meaningful looks with Spade which reinforce the male's superior position with respect to the knowing control of the gaze.⁷ Against Spade's straight-faced act of concern as he proceeds with his initial interrogation of "Miss Wonderly," Archer is all rolling eyes and smacking lips and foppish lady-killer mustache—the openly libidinous aspect of the detective hero which must be repressed at all accounts in order that the protagonist can appear to the world as a paradigm of self-control. This display is necessary precisely because the world of social convention allows itself to be governed by the law, while the detective, according to the myth, in his generic position on the shadowy edges of the law must depend on himself and no one else for governance. Once the pseudonymous Miss Wonderly is ushered out of their male domain, however, the two sides of the same detective (the names "Spade and Archer" on the office windows permeate the scene as if inseparably linked: faint trace, one is tempted to suspect, of Jekyll and Hyde) can conjoin to gloat over the woman's crisp hundred-dollar bills, and look forward to more from where these two came from. Given the detective hero's unconscious commitment to repression, however, it can be no coincidence that the lascivious Miles Archer is shot to death in the following scene, allowing Spade to proceed as if truly autonomous, the genre's ideological model of male self-containment. Of course Spade neither mourns nor wastes time in having Archer's name removed from his windows, through which anyone with open eyes, as it were, is apt to see: if anybody knows the dangers of incriminating evidence, it is the man whose job it is to pin it on others.

THE
MALTESE
FALCON:
*Spade and
Archer—
soon to
be just
Spade*



As well, in fact, he should; for Spade has been sleeping with Archer's wife, now widow, another instance of his generic duplicity. When, however, the hopeful Iva Archer appears at his office begging, "Be kind to me, Sam, be kind," Spade's cynicism takes an openly cruel turn: he snarls and curls his lip, wolfishly baring his teeth, and taking pleasure in the woman's pathetic vulnerability.⁸ It is as if the mutual knowledge of their sexual deceit has led to a particularly vicious power relationship, one in which the male has, and uses, the upper hand. It is only to remove her from his sight (note once again the male control of the gaze, even in the physical negation thereof) that he resorts to reassuring words, speaking to Iva's back so that only the audience can see the undisguised falseness in his face, in sharp contrast to the pained willingness to be lied to in hers. Interestingly, this scene foreshadows, in more ways than one, Spade's next meeting with "Miss Wonderly," now "Leblanc." After confessing her real name, Brigid O'Shaughnessy continues to overplay the sentimental innocent, prompting Spade finally to call her bluff. With all the facility of a trained actress, she immediately adopts the helpless tone of a conventional lady in distress ("I'm alone, afraid. I've got no one to help me. . . . Be generous. You're brave. You're strong.")

only to have Spade sarcastically compliment her on her theatrical abilities, calling particular attention to her expert use of her eyes.

This emphasis on the eyes of the female is a feature which re-emerges in each of the subsequent three films under consideration. Thus when the face of the Gloria Grahame character is disfigured with hot coffee in *The Big Heat*, one half of her face disappears behind a highly stylized bandage, leaving her visible eye all the more vulnerably prominent. Likewise in *Chinatown*, Jack Nicholson notices a flaw in the iris of the same eye through which the fatal bullet will pass when Faye Dunaway is finally killed. And in *Angel Heart* Harold Angel (Mickey Rourke) simply tells Epiphany (Lisa Bonet) that she has beautiful eyes. All these female eyes prove to be obstacles blocking the detective's will to knowledge/power in their owners' ability, albeit temporary, to hide what they have witnessed: theft, murder, incest, rape. More important, however, they also act in aggregate as ultimate sources of the genre's deepest recognitions, the most damning of which is, via the adoption of their perspective, the disillusioned recognition of the detective's own self.

Such self-recognition does not come automatically, however. The tattered package that

Sam Spade carries with him down the stairs in the last scene of *The Maltese Falcon* may well be only “the stuff that dreams are made of” (a self-conscious line not found in Hammett’s novel but attributed, rather, to Huston)⁹ but the obstinate fact remains that Spade pointedly does not relinquish it. His received male view of the world—cynical, even callous, and with woman at the center of corruption—is only reinforced by the film’s ending, so that his own taste for what is at best playful bullying (he suggests that Brigid hock her jewelry and furs in order to support herself after he has taken the last of her money) and at worst overt sadism (he places his hands on her throat as he speaks of her possible sentencing to the gallows) is left finally and problematically unexamined. Such an ending, with its romantically anti-heroic emphasis on the solitary male who is perhaps sadder but none the wiser, and who, more to the point, is also still in possession of the dominant sexual ideology (i.e., the stuff that dreams are made of), is the more troubling in light of the fact that Spade has just obliquely admitted his penchant for the ways of those he works so doggedly to “send over.” In a sentence which compresses multiple ambiguities into the syntax of what is nothing if not a negative command—“Don’t be so sure I’m as crooked as I’m supposed to be”—we recognize the same man of irony (or is it?) who drinks “Success to crime!” in the company of sworn officers of the law. The delayed irony upon irony here is that it is *not* a crime to behave just as he behaves toward women throughout the film, and as detective heroes do virtually throughout the entire genre. (If the objection is raised that this account conveniently omits any mention of Spade’s secretary, Effie Perrine, it has only to be observed that her behavior throughout the story is so congenial to her boss that he pays her the ultimate phallocentric compliment of calling her “a good man.”)

The Big Heat presents us with a different perspective on much the same basic vision. Whereas we discover police detective Bannion (Glenn Ford) at the beginning of this film happily married and at ease with the females in his life—he shares kitchen duties with his wife, tells cute bedtime stories to his little girl—the plot wastes no time in exploding that bubble: a car bomb meant for him accidentally kills his wife instead.¹⁰ The overdrawn security of the domes-

tic sphere thus instantaneously obliterated, Bannion soon finds himself pressured off the police force and into the monadic/nomadic life of the private detective, where the conventional rules of the genre again obtain.

Set in the Cold War 1950s, however, when such stabilizing structures of bourgeois ideology as the family, with its emphasis/dependence on monogamy and self-control, were under special pressure to compensate in the face of unprecedented global instability—largely a consequence of the biggest homewrecker of them all, *the Bomb*—*The Big Heat* would seem to situate its protagonist in a less compromised, less ambiguous, and thus less credible relation to women than the one acted out by Bogart’s wolfish Sam Spade.¹¹ World War II, the global context in which *The Maltese Falcon* premiered, was a war which at least could be fought, so that, in an important sense to consider, the story could afford to play relatively faster and looser with the subjectively local (and male-dominated) battle of the sexes. Not as much would have been consciously or unconsciously assumed to be riding on the mandatory maintenance of traditional family ties when the country as a whole could still mobilize for active combat overseas. Besides, the narrative world of *The Maltese Falcon* is so decisively closed¹² that we hardly notice the virtual absence of normative family relationships: the Archer marriage is a sham, the Cairo-Gutman-Wilmer triangle is strongly suggestive of homosexuality, and only the manly-maternal Effie Perrine seems to have anything in the way of a blood relation (in the absent person of an offstage mother), while Brigid O’Shaughnessy’s plot-initiating tale about her sister and parents turns out to be a complete fabrication. In *The Big Heat*, however, we are given to understand that the family actually does play an essential role—if also essentially arbitrary, in view of the fact that the crime lord Lagana also has a family and a daughter of his own. At any rate, the ideal family experience detailed at the beginning of the story functions in such a way that the widower Bannion, even when he is catapulted out of his matrimonial redoubt by the untimely death of his wife, can continue to function throughout the remainder of the film as a faithfully married man.

But what then of his complicity, if my thesis is to hold up, in the detective genre’s commitment to the physical and emotional mistreat-

ment of women as a central element of the myth which that genre enshrines? It would seem that, if anything, Glenn Ford as Bannion remains irreproachable on the subject, the one upright man in a world most tellingly represented by the Lee Marvin character, Vince Stone, who stubs his cigarette out on the hand of a woman he does not even know, and throws scalding coffee in the face of his girlfriend. Indeed, Bannion consistently resists such obvious assaults against women, setting out, in the first place, to bring his wife's murderers to justice, and in the scene just alluded to making Stone apologize to the woman whose hand he has burned, and then driving him out of the bar. Moreover, when Debby Marsh (Gloria Grahame) appears in his hotel room and all but offers outright to climb into bed with him, Bannion politely but firmly declines, the very model of abiding fidelity. But once her face is disfigured, divided by the scar tissue into halves suggestive of good and bad selves, she returns to him sexlessly, as if purged of the bad, indeed the only way that he will suffer her to share his room. By way of sharp contrast, Bogart's Spade again comes to mind, cynically telling Brigid O'Shaughnessy that it is to their mutual advantage that she has not lived a good life, because "if you were innocent, we'd get nowhere." Could it be then that, in offering us this revisionist version of the detective, *The Big Heat* is calling into question the very terms of his existence? The answer to this question must be a qualified yes: to the extent that the film swerves from generic conventions it is indeed raising key, if not radical, questions. But whether it is in fact thereby subverting firmly established codes of character is another question altogether, and not one to be answered so readily.

While the film would seem to insist upon a hero untainted by universal corruption—this is a world, after all, in which the police commissioner plays poker with the thugs—Bannion himself in the end is reinstated all too easily and willingly into the symbiotic world of official law and out-law: he is given back his badge, his name plate, and his job. And yet there is about this willingness a curious quality of passivity, evident as he is ushered back through the ranks of uniformed officers to the desk which represents his true home. The other desks in the film over which the camera has lingered belong to, respectively, the policeman who commits



THE BIG HEAT: Gloria Grahame and Glenn Ford

suicide in the first frames of the film, and Lagana, who controls the police. Such obvious visual circularity leads to the inescapable inference that, for all the motivational faultlessness of Bannion's privately enacted will to knowledge, the will to power embedded therein is too thoroughly connected to his life as a cop to allow him to disengage from the circle. His character's rigid denial of all impulses not unambiguously legitimate underscores his total surrender to the forces of repression—the police force, as it were, within himself—well before the fatal car bomb goes off. In the end, his wife might as well have never been alive, because in the most important sense he is married not to her but to his job, a job which depends for its existence on the likes of the psychopathic Vince Stone. Significantly, the misogynous threat which Stone embodies is indirectly resurrected in the last line of the movie, when Bannion, on his way out to investigate the report of a hit-and-run case, orders the coffee to be kept hot for his return. As the rehabilitated Debby Marsh tells the crooked widow of the policeman suicide, "We're sisters under the mink." Likewise, Bannion's true family allegiance is to the larger family of cops and criminals, against which hearth and home are but puny defenses. Such recognitions regarding the thrust of generic implication in *The Big Heat*, however, are left for us to discover, and not the character who elicits them. It is not until *Chinatown* that the detective begins to suspect himself.

Removed from the era which it evokes (1930s Los Angeles) by some thirty to forty years, *Chinatown* cannot fail but to have a longer perspective on the genre. Such a perspective, inevitably more self-aware, may be said to suggest itself overtly in Jake Gittes's use of telephoto camera lenses and long-range binoculars

as he conducts his investigation first into falsely alleged matrimonial infidelities and then into more substantive political and moral corruption. As his relentless search for the geographical boundaries of this corruption takes him ever farther afield, away from the conventional urban cityscape of the genre, it also takes him psychologically inward toward its incestuous heart. This double movement of the narrative is effectively mirrored in the film's use of the particular story which it tells to investigate the genre which it extends; nor does the detective protagonist finally escape self-scrutiny.

Of all the detectives we are considering, however, Jake Gittes would appear at first glance our least likely candidate for the examined life. As played by Jack Nicholson, he is a coarse man given to two-tone shoes and tasteless sex jokes of the shaggy-dog variety, with little of Bogart's characteristic self-restraint, and none of Glenn Ford's unyielding integrity. He does "matrimonial work," the lowest kind a private detective can stoop to do, and he is not above exploiting the newspapers for personal publicity. Unlike Sam Spade, moreover, whose suspicions are on the alert from the very start, Gittes remains clueless for some time that the woman who approaches him at the beginning of the film, an impostor calling herself Evelyn Murray, is telling him nothing but lies. When he comes face to face for the first time with the real Evelyn Murray, however, who persuades him to understand that he has been tricked into publicly humiliating her, he is first stunned by her beauty and then propelled into the complicating action by her icy threat of legal proceedings.¹³ While the initiating actions of their plots are thus remarkably similar—a woman comes to the detective offering misleading information—*Chinatown* and *The Maltese Falcon* differ significantly in the way that each establishes the protagonist's ability to sniff out, as it were, a lie. Nor is the nasal metaphor at all out of place. Caught comically off guard, Gittes must hustle to rectify his mistake, and in the process he nearly loses his nose. After having it slashed by the sadistic thug (played by Roman Polanski), he must wear a bandage through a good part of the subsequent film which is strangely reminiscent of that worn by Gloria Grahame in *The Big Heat*. Whereas hers covers her eye, however—the passive receiver of the male gaze—Nicholson's covers his nose, leav-

ing both eyes free to probe, even while suggesting a tragicomic impairment of the detective's investigative-generative faculties. For while he can discover the still pool of evil in the destructive flow of Noah Cross's Water-and-Power monomania, he can finally do nothing creative or life-saving about it. And thus we return, as the detective genre insists we always must, to the problematic nexus of sex/knowledge/power.

Swept up in the narrative rush of incident and fact as he is swept up in the torrent of clandestinely released city water, the wisecracking Gittes, who at first acts as if he must know all there is to know about sexual foibles, finds himself investigating marital irregularities of positively monstrous dimensions.¹⁴ As his wide-ranging search for knowledge, moreover, narrows down to the pin-point focus of the film—Noah Cross's rape of the land as it is embodied in the rape of his own daughter, and the subsequent siring of his own granddaughter—Gittes must begin to confront the ugly implications of his own role in Evelyn's victimization. It is, after all, in bed with Evelyn after sex that he has admitted his unintentional complicity in doing harm to a former lover. Now, having been mistakenly convinced that she has been lying to him, as he was previously convinced by her impostor's lies, Gittes realizes that he has all but sent her over, in Spade's laconic phrase, to her doom. The horrifying knowledge which he slaps out of her ("She's my sister *and* my daughter!") unveils the unspeakable power which Noah Cross (John Huston) is able and willing to employ, and against which the detective's feeble epistemic resources are ultimately impotent.

The utter futility of merely knowing is underscored in the final scene of the film. Welcoming the security of arrest ("Good news!") in the face of impending violence at the hands of Cross's henchman, Gittes enacts his own version of the detective's surrender to the repressive power of the Law, which makes sure that *in* justice is finally done. "He *owns* the police!" Evelyn cries of her father when Gittes urges her to let the police take care of him. Try as he might to deflect the tragic course of events to which he now knows himself instrumental, Gittes cannot deflect the aim of the officer whose shot pierces Evelyn's eye. The film ends with Gittes being released, as it were upon his own recognizance/recognition. Unlike Bannion in



ANGEL HEART: Lisa Bonet, Mickey Rourke

The Big Heat, however, who can return to the world of convention essentially unchanged by his odyssey underground, Gittes has learned all too well the extent of his own tragic involvement in the world of evil, against which irony is insufficient. Despite his associate's admonition to willed forgetfulness ("Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown."), knowledge is all Gittes has left to him at the end, that and the prospect of living with what he has come to know. Thus blooded in his emergent self-consciousness, the detective can only plunge deeper into its depths, the generic (and unconscious) implications of which are made violently to gush forth in *Angel Heart*.

If *Chinatown's* perspective on the detective genre is made longer by virtue of the date of its production, *Angel Heart* enjoys the added benefit of another decade. Before beginning my discussion of the film proper, however, I want to suggest that the graphic and narrative excesses of *Angel Heart*, as off-putting as they are, are exactly overdetermined by the whole history of the detective genre up to the moment which *Angel Heart* defines. This is not to suggest, I hasten to add, that *Angel Heart* is artistically equal to any of the other films I am considering. Among other things, some of its actors simply cannot act, notably Lisa Bonet in the role of Epiphany. Nevertheless, the film is worth attending to for its undeniable contribution to the growing self-consciousness of both the detective and the genre which he inhabits.

As if to geo-graph the surface contours of this immersion in psychological depths, *Angel Heart* sends its protagonist, the eponymous Harold Angel (Mickey Rourke), south from New York City to the outskirts of New Orleans, where the unlikely becomes all too everyday. "I'm from Brooklyn," Angel keeps repeating,

by way of explaining his commonsense resistance to what he regards as merely the occult, but which for native locals constitutes the reality behind their visible world. If the film's heavy-handed displacement of the psychological into the realm of voodoo and, ultimately, horror, radically undermines all pretense of verisimilitude—the lack of which is, in itself, rarely sufficient cause to criticize genre films—it also enables the film-maker's indulgence in narrative and visual extremity. For all the unexplained, inexplicable and frankly irrelevant loose ends which litter the narrative (what, for a representative example, is Angel's "thing" about chickens, reiterated often enough to be downright annoying?), *Angel Heart* can claim illustrious precedent; not even Howard Hawks could keep track of all the plot lines in *The Big Sleep*. When we pause to consider, however, the extreme ways in which *Angel Heart* seeks to visualize its protagonist's unwitting investigation into the terms of his own identity, it becomes clear that new ground is being broken.

Of course sex is fundamental here, carnal knowledge itself as pre-revelation, where what is revealed is the motive will to power in the narrative will to know, and where the will to power is itself lethally psychopathic. But how else does the detective come to know except by exercising his eye, the preferred tool of penetration suggested in the term "private eye"? (Interestingly, *Angel Heart* carries over the suggestion of psychosexual damage done the detective's nose in *Chinatown* by outfitting its protagonist with a grotesque sun-guard from Coney Island: if ever there was one, a displaced prophylactic!) The taste for voyeurism to which the whole detective genre plays is thus here given full sway, in terms of what both Angel and Angel's audience come to see. What Stephen Heath has to say about the cinematic fragmentation of the body may be applied to *Angel Heart*, the primary aim of which is to dramatize the recognition of the paradoxically shattering reintegration of Harold Angel's known "self" with the repressed persona of the murderer within:

And yet, again, cinema does fragment, plays—within the limits of the narrative and its meanings and resolution—on the passage between fragmented body and the image possession of the body whole, in order. . . . Yet then again, another twist, wanting to "see all" extends not just into the appropriation of



ANGEL HEART: *The Luciferian De Niro*

wholeness and unity but also into the desire for *everything*, all of the body, every bit: cinema plays on the hidden visible to be suggested, glimpsed, revealed, plays on the shown and the limits of the shown and the expectations and pleasures produced in the displacement and use of those limits. At the end of cinema is the pornographic film sold on "showing everything," *the act, the scene . . .*¹⁵

Heath's last comment succinctly explains the packaging of the *Angel Heart* videotape, which boasts "The Original Unedited Version." More to the point, though, is the developmental movement of the genre's emphasis on sex as the detective's problematically primary way to knowledge, the logical endpoint of which must be knowledge of self. Buckets of blood rain down upon them as Angel and Epiphany (no name is too obvious in this film) copulate, though we are given to understand that the blood exists only in Angel's troubled imagination. As it turns out, however, the blood is actually on his hands, and he discovers that it is he himself who has wreaked the mayhem which seems to dog him: the washed-out junky doctor shot through the eye, the black musician choked to death with his own dismembered penis, the tarot reader disembowelled, and finally Epiphany, shot point-blank in the vagina. If the mere written catalog of atrocities effectively brutalizes the eye, all the more so do the rendered images of the film. Indeed, Angel himself is so sickened at the spectacle of the eviscerated heart that the scene would seem to imply the death of pleasure itself in the genre's exploitation of the voyeuristic, an incrimination of the audience simultaneous with that of its detective hero. When Angel breaks down in front of the mirror, repeating over and over again, "I know who I am," the on-screen gaze which meets itself is replicated between screen and viewer. Angel is the Father, more Noah Cross

than Cross himself, the embodied ideology of patriarchy who kills off anyone likely to betray his true identity and thus demystify him. He sleeps with his own daughter—the mother of his son, with which child he then identifies, appropriating an innocence which properly belongs to no one at all—and then he kills her rather than be named for who he is.¹⁶

A pretty picture this does not make, neither of Harold Angel nor of the genre as a whole, and yet I would argue that the logic of *Angel Heart* is inscribed in *The Maltese Falcon* as well as in those of its inheritors considered here. But of course that logic is obscured in *Angel Heart* just as effectively as (if more broadly than) it is obscured in all the others, blamed on the devil, the original Father of Lies. "I don't know anything about women," Sam Spade says early on *The Maltese Falcon*, and we wonder how seriously we are to take him; and then we recall Hammett's introductory description of Spade as looking "rather pleasantly like a blond Satan."¹⁷ The hard-boiled detective genre which he inaugurated may be said to have been broken open by *Angel Heart*, comically cracked like the egg under the hand of Lucifer (Robert DeNiro) and consumed by the horror genre which he represents, but the problems raised by the genre's aesthetic—in particular those of sex and knowledge and power—await the further dialectic of deconstructive reconstitution.¹⁸

NOTES

1. John B. Cawelti calls the hard-boiled detective story "an important American myth." See his "Chinatown and Generic Transformation," in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 184. James Naremore uses the term "male myth" in "John Huston and *The Maltese Falcon*," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3.
2. For a provocative and influential discussion of sex, knowledge, and power, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
3. For a discussion of the term "semantic" as used here, see Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," in Grant, pp. 26–40.
4. I am thinking obliquely here of Laura Mulvey's stop-and-go distinction between female spectacle and male narrative, though I do not "split" them as radically as she does. In the detective genre, at least, "the power of the male protagonist as he controls events" is by no means absolute, though Mulvey's argument would seem to make it out to be so. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen*, v. 16 (1975), pp. 6–18, especially p. 12.
5. To this general fact there are specific exceptions in which the male/female tension is happily resolved. *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946) comes to mind.
6. For the classic pronouncement on the detective's supposed code of honor, see Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder," originally published in *Saturday Review of Literature*, November, 1944.

7. For her useful critique of the male gaze in cinema, see Mulvey, *op. cit.*
8. Hammett uses such lupine imagery often in describing Spade. For examples, see Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, 1929 (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 10, 188.
9. Naremore, p. 249.
10. Janey Place argues that the family setting in *The Big Heat* is "so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction. . . ." See her "Women in Film Noir" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 50.
11. This detour into the contextual world of fact, although it is merely a detour, should signal my tendency to disagree with Fowler's contention that in "trying to account for generic change . . . , it is not a good idea to turn immediately to explanation in terms of external causes, which may actually be quite remote." See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 277. While I would not wish to argue that it is a good idea to turn exclusively toward the external, neither do I think that the conditions of history are ever really remote from any artistic development. The sooner we can see the connections, I would say, the better for responsible criticism.
12. For his helpful discussion of "open" and "closed" films, see Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), especially pp. 44-51.
13. Mulvey's concept of female stop-action spectacle works quite nicely in this instance, while that of the male narrative determinant doesn't even apply.
14. Deborah Linderman offers an impressive and illuminating anal-

ysis of *Chinatown's* oedipal commitments in "Oedipus in Chinatown," *enclitic* 10-11 (Fall 1981-Spring 1982), pp. 190-203. See also Liahna K. Babner, "Chinatown, City of Blight," *Los Angeles in Fiction*, David Fine, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 1984), pp. 243-255.

15. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 184-5.

16. According to the structuralist view of classical narrative promulgated by Roland Barthes and glossed here by Altman, "plot follows an Oedipal configuration: both the protagonist's desire and the text itself are generated by a search for the Father. Like Oedipus, the protagonist is thus a detective." It is the detective genre's distinction to have completed that search with *Angel Heart's* self-discovery. See Charles F. Altman, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, v. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 519.

17. Hammett, p. 3.

18. Two other films come to mind with regard to the historical process of the detective genre's self-deconstruction: *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955) and *Gumshoe* (Stephen Frears, 1971). Both films prefigure *Angel Heart's* tendency toward a deconstructive comedy of excess, though the respective protagonist of each differs significantly in degree of self-consciousness. While *Kiss Me Deadly's* American-with-a-vengeance Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) remains obstinately, almost robotically unself-conscious, *Gumshoe's* British comedian-turned-detective Eddie Ginley (Albert Finney) is undergoing nothing other than the frustrating refinement of (non-Freudian) psychotherapy.

Reviews

THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE

Written and directed by Anthony Thomas. Photography: Curtis Clark. Public Broadcasting System.

The style of the British documentary film-maker Antony Thomas is passionate and committed. He has a gentleman's *politesse*, but he's a good old-fashioned muckracker at heart; he's not afraid to ask embarrassing questions (and he's skillful enough to get away with it), or to let his own views filter into his interviews—to put himself on the line. And maybe, treating the explosion of the "born-again" Christian movement in this country since the watershed Baptist convention in Dallas in 1980, he's dug deeper than an American might have been able to. He lays out the issues with tremendous clarity; despite the amount of information the movie asks you to assimilate, you feel your head is being cleared out while you watch.

The movement is an outgrowth of Baptist Christianity, which refocused the basic Protestant impulse—the desire for a potential link between man and God—on the moment when a

Christian receives God in his/her heart; this "personal salvation," known in contemporary

religious jargon as the "born-again" moment, is the crucial step that guarantees today's churchgoers entrance to the kingdom of heaven—with no strings attached, if you listen to men of the cloth like Dr. Criswell, the minister of the First Baptist Church of Dallas (the largest Evangelist church in the country, with 26,000 members, or Dr. Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies (which turns out preachers). According to these men, heaven is the most exclusive of country clubs; there are no exceptions to the "born-again" entrance rule. (Patterson tells Thomas that even Mother Teresa is damned if she never has the "conversion experience.") Listening to Criswell and Patterson talk, you feel as if you'd fallen down a rabbit hole and ended up in a land where the Crusades are still being fought. The new pagans are the liberals (or "secular humanists") and especially the Communists.

Thomas shows us a sampler of people attracted by the movement. Some of the Christians he interviews have dreadful stories to tell, of alcoholism and dope addiction, incest and child rape, and you don't wonder that, finding God, they "felt clean for the first time" (as one woman explains, gripping her husband's hand,